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BRIDGETOWN FOR LEGATT

E.O. 12958, N/A

TAGS: [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [BF](#)

SUBJECT: Bahamas Gets Serious about Tourist Safety

1. SUMMARY: In an effort to better protect tourists, the Bahamian Government organized a major, high-level conference to establish a public/private advisory board on visitor safety. Hosted by the Ministry of Tourism and the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF), the meeting included frank talk about safety concerns and specific suggestions for improvement. The conference's goal was to establish a permanent Visitor Safety and Security Board made up of both public and private stakeholders that will make recommendations regarding visitor safety and oversee implementation of these changes. END SUMMARY.

A Sobering Start

2. The conference began dramatically with the showing of a British news segment on the death of a two-year-old child on the beach in the Bahamas in a commercial boating accident. The video was harshly critical of the Bahamian government, blaming it for poor regulation of the water sports industry. The video ended with the reporter recommending that visitors not come to the Bahamas. This self-critical opening set the tone for the rest of the conference.

Embassy Speakers

3. The Ambassador, the ARSO, the Asst. LEGATT and the ACS CONOFF all addressed the conference. The Ambassador emphasized that visitors are becoming more concerned about security and are choosing destinations based upon their reputation for safety. The ARSO discussed the high level of cooperation between the Bahamian Government and the USG, including a variety of training and support programs under Diplomatic Security's Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA). Asst. LEGATT explained that the best way to prevent terrorism is to prevent crime, and talked about the success of New York's community-based policing program. CONOFF described embassy activities for prevention of crime and victim's assistance and highlighted the importance of Bahamian efforts to build capacity on both fronts.

Specific Suggestions

4. During workshop sessions, the emphasis was on realistic, high-impact programs. Major ideas discussed included:

- Establishing a separate tourist police/patrol division to prevent crime and enforce safety laws in tourist areas;
- Establishing a tourist court, or creating a system to give expedited handling and special processing to tourist cases;
- Establishing an "Amber Alert" program in the Bahamas;
- Installing security cameras in all public tourist areas;
- Distributing safety tips and other information in hotels and with immigration cards on arrival;
- Improving signage throughout the islands to delineate tourist areas and keep tourists out of dangerous areas; and
- Establishing victim assistance caseworkers in the MOT to serve as a single point of contact and to monitor cases

Summary

5. The Bahamian Government must next decide the exact composition of the advisory board. The board will then take all of the ideas from the conference and develop specific plans with schedules and price estimates for implementation. The date set for the first meeting is November 1.

6. COMMENT: The conference had over 100 attendees from the public and private sector and attracted high level speakers,

including the Minister of Tourism, the Acting Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of National Security, and the

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Deputy Police Commissioner. The overall tone was an unflinching willingness to address the hard issues, with few speakers being defensive or spinning the discussions. While the agenda was impressive, implementing the many good ideas will present many legal, policy, and resource challenges. After its establishment, the advisory board will most likely start with the most easily implemented ideas, and look to build upon some early successes to gradually expand their scope of action. From the outset, the Bahamian authorities solicited Embassy input and participation, and have made clear they are willing to work closely with us to enhance the safety of American visitors to the Bahamas. The Government's willingness to reach out to and engage the private sector was also a welcome departure, reflecting the recognition of the importance of this issue to the Bahamas major economic sector. END COMMENT.

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